

Growth in UK online investment raises IT vs. marketing question

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22 June 2004: Mediasurface, the UK's largest Content Management provider, is predicting a significant increase in spending on corporate online assets by UK businesses over the next nine months. But, Mediasurface warns, businesses risk wasting both time and money unless they address the fundamental issue of who owns the company website: the IT department or marketing team.

Mediasurface's prediction of an upturn in the market is based on its own customer experiences and are broadly inline with forecasts made in May 2004 by US-based JupiterResearch, which issued a report saying: "Forty-nine percent of companies surveyed said they planned from two to four major development initiatives in 2004, such as new home pages, new navigation, new design, new search technology, content management or other major functionality."

According to Mediasurface the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), which comes into force in October this year, is one of the driving forces behind this increase in spending. The DDA stipulates that everybody with a presence on the web has to make 'reasonable adjustments' to cater for the needs of the disabled web user; failure to do so could lead to legal action being taken against the website owner. But unless changes are made to the way content on web pages is managed, much of this investment could turn out to have been a waste of time; out-of date copy on a web page could easily turn potential customers away.

The gap between the people who generate the content and those who deliver it to the website can cause significant problems, according to Nick Bolton, Senior Vice President of Worldwide Product Marketing at Mediasurface.

"For the majority of businesses, content changes on a website can only be carried out by people with the necessary technical skills, Java, HTML, and so on," Bolton said. "Yet this approach presents two difficulties: it increases the workload of the technical team by giving them routine copy editing tasks to complete, and it stops those people within an organisation who generate the content from becoming more actively involved in the way that content appears online."

The first of these problems can cost time and money, as expensive resources become routinely distracted by what should be non-technical duties, such as taking copy and converting it to HTML to then be uploaded onto a web page. The second problem can lead to a website becoming out of date with stale content left without regular updates.

Following a period of around three years during which time many businesses were extremely cautious about spending money on their websites, Mediasurface has seen an upturn in the number of companies giving this type of spending a higher priority and with it an increasing demand to put more control in the hands of the content authors.

"There is an acceptance among the business community that IT spending decisions have become the responsibility of the business; they have not been left as the domain of the IT department. Now that approach needs to extend; control over the way online content is managed needs to be placed in the hands of the people who own the content, not left with the IT department, who are there to build and manage the

infrastructure, not to be content authors," Bolton continued.

"The Mediasurface contribution process means we have a more efficient website management policy for <l>www.learndirect.com</l>. The ICT team perform essential works, whilst the teams of content authors make simple content changes as required. Whereas we initially had just four people managing content, due to the flexibility of Mediasurface we now have thirty," said Robin Jeeps, Head of New Media at University for Industry.

Launched earlier this year, Mediasurface's innovative Morello acts as a bridge between the business and technical user. It is the first smart client desktop application for content management and has an intuitive, graphical interface. Morello enables business professionals to deliver sophisticated websites with no requirement for programming knowledge. It makes content management accessible to the people who use it and is presented through a familiar Windows client environment, meaning Morello users can select the right template, explore content and using a choice of views, organise the site in a way that makes sense to them.

Bolton continued: "Our vision of the future is one where the power of the enterprise application is in the hands of the people who need it the most: the marketing, communications and business professionals. We want to see our customers enhance their online strategy through technology, using Morello to form the bridge between the complex technical model of content management and the needs of the non-technical user."

About Mediasurface:

Mediasurface provide pioneering software that empowers the business user to build and manage sophisticated content driven websites.

Mediasurface software combines an interactive, graphical look and feel with industrial strength technology. Easy to use, business professionals can manage sites seamlessly, enabling authorised personnel to effortlessly update the content they 'own' without needing technically skilled web authors to craft HTML pages by hand.

Mediasurface helps organisations reduce the risks and costs involved in building and running websites and other digital channels. It increases their ability to keep pace with change and assures the quality of the content published – ultimately increasing the usefulness of these online resources.

A British born company headquartered in Newbury, UK, Mediasurface products and services have been implemented to drive over 300 web applications solutions for customers across Europe and the United States.

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